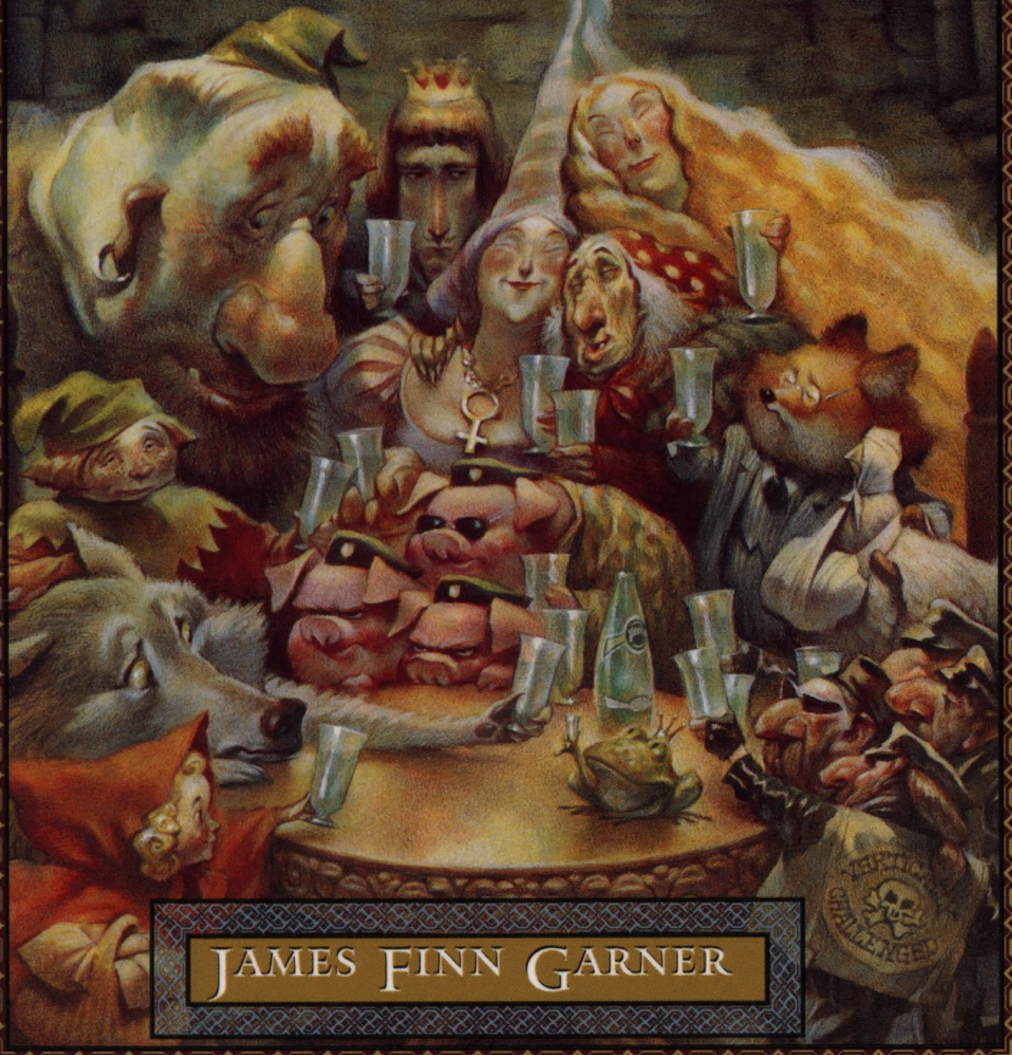
Politically Correct Bedtime Stories

Modern Tales for Our Life & Times



James Finn Garner

>$8.95
>$12.95 IN CANADA

Once upon a time, in the olden days, heavy-set middle-aged men would congregate in their elitist clubs, sit in overstuffed leather chairs, smoke air-choking cigars, and pitch story ideas and plots to each other. Problem was, these stories, many of which found their way into the general social consciousness, reflected the way in which these men lived and saw their world: that is, the stories were sexist, discriminatory, unfair, culturally biased, and in general, demeaning to witches, animals, goblins, and fairies everywhere.

Finally, after centuries of these abusive tales, which have been handed down—unknowingly—from one male-biased generation to the next, James Finn Garner has taken it upon himself (that's right, yet another man) to enlighten and liberate these classic bedtime stories and retell them in a way that is much more in keeping with the society in which we live today.

Politically Correct Bedtime Stories, then, is the fruit of Garner's labors. We'd like to think that future generations of fairy-tale fans will see this as a worthy attempt to develop meaningful literature that is totally free from bias and purged from the influences of a flawed cultural past.

POLITICALLY CORRECT BEDTIME STORIES

POLITICALLY CORRECT BEDTIME STORIES

JAMES FINN GARNER

MACMILLAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
NEW YORK

MAXWELL MACMILLAN CANADA
TORONTO

MAXWELL MACMILLAN INTERNATIONAL
NEW YORK OXFORD SINGAPORE SYDNEY

This a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 1994 by James Finn Garner

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publisher.

Macmillan Publishing Company
866 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10022

Maxwell Macmillan Canada, Inc.
1200 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 200
Don Mills, Ontario M3C 3N1

An excerpt originally appeared in *Playboy* magazine.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LISA AMOROSO

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Garner, James Finn
Politically correct bedtime stories/James Finn Garner.
p. cm.
ISBN 0-02-542730-X
1. Fairy tales—Adaptations. 2. Political correctness. I. Title.
PS3557.A71667P65 1994
813'.54—dc20 93-11481 CIP

Macmillan Books are available at special discounts for bulk purchases for sales promotions, premiums, fund-raising, or educational use. For details, contact:

Special Sales Director
Macmillan Publishing Company
866 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10022

20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11

Printed in the United States of America

To the Theater of the Bizarre,
including Pepe, Armando, Egon, Ted,
Matteo, Nick, and Julietta; James Ghelkins, Jr.,
and Willie, Smitty, and Jocko
of the Teamsters Children's Puppet Theater;
and Others too numerous to mention.
To Carol, for help and encouragement,
and to Lies, for everything.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ix
LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD 1
THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES 5
THE THREE LITTLE PIGS 9
RUMPELSTILTSKIN 13
THE THREE CODEPENDENT GOATS GRUFF 17
RAPUNZEL 23
CINDERELLA 31
GOLDILOCKS 39
SNOW WHITE 43
CHICKEN LITTLE 57
THE FROG PRINCE 63
JACK AND THE BEANSTALK 67
THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN 73

INTRODUCTION

When they were first written, the stories on which the following tales are based certainly served their purpose—to entrench the patriarchy, to estrange people from their own natural impulses, to demonize "evil" and to "reward" an "objective" "good." However much we might like to, we cannot blame the Brothers Grimm for their insensitivity to womyn's issues, minority cultures, and the environment. Likewise, in the self-righteous Copenhagen of Hans Christian Andersen, the inalienable rights of mermaids were hardly given a second thought.

Today, we have the opportunity—and the obligation—to rethink these "classic" stories so they reflect more enlightened times. To that effort I submit this humble book. While its original title, *Fairy Stories For a Modern World,* was abandoned for obvious reasons (kudos to my editor for pointing out my heterosexu-

alist bias), I think the collection stands on its own. This, however, is just a start. Certain stories, such as "The Duckling That Was Judged on Its Personal Merits and Not on Its Physical Appearance," were deleted for space reasons. I expect I have volumes left in me, and I hope this book sparks the righteous imaginations of other writers and, of course, leaves an indelible mark on our children.

If, through omission or commission, I have inadvertently displayed any sexist, racist, culturalist, nationalist, regionalist, ageist, lookist, ableist, sizeist, speciesist, intellectualist, socioeconomicist, ethnocentrist, phallocentrist, heteropatriarchalist, or other type of bias as yet unnamed, I apologize and encourage your suggestions for rectification. In the quest to develop meaningful literature that is totally free from bias and purged from the influences of its flawed cultural past, I doubtless have made some mistakes.

POLITICALLY CORRECT BEDTIME STORIES

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

here once was a young person named Red Riding Hood who lived with her mother on the edge of a large wood. One day her mother asked her to take a basket of fresh fruit and mineral water to her grandmother's house—not because this was womyn's work, mind you, but because the deed was generous and helped engender a feeling of community. Furthermore, her grandmother was *not* sick, but rather was in full physical and mental health and was fully capable of taking care of herself as a mature adult.

So Red Riding Hood set off with her basket through the woods. Many people believed that the forest was a foreboding and dangerous place and never set foot in it. Red Riding Hood, however, was confident enough in her own budding sexuality that such obvious Freudian imagery did not intimidate her.

On the way to Grandma's house, Red Riding Hood was accosted by a wolf, who asked her what was in her basket. She replied, "Some healthful snacks for my grandmother, who is certainly capable of taking care of herself as a mature adult."

The wolf said, "You know, my dear, it isn't safe for a little girl to walk through these woods alone."

Red Riding Hood said, "I find your sexist remark offensive in the extreme, but I will ignore it because of your traditional status as an outcast from society, the stress of which has caused you to develop your own, entirely valid, worldview. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must be on my way."

Red Riding Hood walked on along the main path. But, because his status outside society had freed him from slavish adherence to linear, Western-style thought, the wolf knew a quicker route to Grandma's house. He burst into the house and ate Grandma, an entirely valid course of action for a car-

nivore such as himself. Then, unhampered by rigid, traditionalist notions of what was masculine or feminine, he put on Grandma's nightclothes and crawled into bed.

Red Riding Hood entered the cottage and said, "Grandma, I have brought you some fat-free, sodium-free snacks to salute you in your role of a wise and nurturing matriarch."

From the bed, the wolf said softly, "Come closer, child, so that I might see you."

Red Riding Hood said, "Oh, I forgot you are as optically challenged as a bat. Grandma, what big eyes you have!"

"They have seen much, and forgiven much, my dear."

"Grandma, what a big nose you have—only relatively, of course, and certainly attractive in its own way."

"It has smelled much, and forgiven much, my dear."

"Grandma, what big teeth you have!"

The wolf said, "I am happy with *who* I am and *what* I am," and leaped out of bed. He grabbed Red Riding Hood in his claws, intent on devouring her. Red Riding Hood screamed, not out of alarm at the

wolf's apparent tendency toward cross-dressing, but because of his willful invasion of her personal space.

Her screams were heard by a passing woodchopper-person (or log-fuel technician, as he preferred to be called). When he burst into the cottage, he saw melee the and tried to intervene. But as he raised his ax, Red Riding Hood and the wolf both stopped.

"And just what do you think you're doing?" asked Red Riding Hood.

The woodchopper-person blinked and tried to answer, but no words came to him.

"Bursting in here like a Neanderthal, trusting your weapon to do your thinking for you!" she exclaimed. "Sexist! Speciesist! How dare you assume that womyn and wolves can't solve their own problems without a man's help!"

When she heard Red Riding Hood's impassioned speech, Grandma jumped out of the wolf's mouth, seized the woodchopper-person's ax, and cut his head off. After this ordeal, Red Riding Hood, Grandma, and the wolf felt a certain commonality of purpose. They decided to set up an alternative household based on mutual respect and cooperation, and they lived together in the woods happily ever after.

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

ar away, in a time long past, there lived a traveling tailor who found himself in an unfamiliar country. Now, tailors who move from place to place normally keep to themselves and are careful not to overstep the bounds of local decency. This tailor, though, was overly gregarious and decorum-impaired, and soon he was at a local inn, abusing alcohol, invading the personal space of the female employees, and telling unenlightened stories about tinkers, dung-gatherers, and other tradespeople.

The innkeeper complained to the police, who

grabbed the tailor and dragged him in front of the emperor. As you might expect, a lifetime of belief in the absolute legitimacy of the monarchy and in the inherent superiority of males had turned the emperor into a vain and wisdom-challenged tyrant. The tailor noticed these traits and decided to use them to his advantage.

The emperor asked, "Do you have any last request before I banish you from my domain forever?"

The tailor replied, "Only that your majesty allow me the honor of crafting a new royal wardrobe. For I have brought with me a special fabric that is so rare and fine that it can be seen only by certain people—the type of people you'd want to have in *your* realm—people who are politically correct, morally righteous, intellectually astute, culturally tolerant, and who don't smoke, drink, laugh at sexist jokes, watch too much television, listen to country music, or barbecue."

After a moment's thought, the emperor agreed to this request. He was flattered by the fascist and testosterone-heavy idea that the empire and its inhabitants existed only to make him look good. It would be like having a trophy wife and multiplying that feeling by 100,000.

Of course, no such rarefied fabric existed. Years of living outside the bounds of normal society had forced the tailor to develop his own moral code that obliged him to swindle and embarrass the emperor in the name of independent craftspeople everywhere. So, as he diligently labored, he was able to convince the emperor that he was cutting and sewing pieces of fabric that, in the strictest objective sense of reality, didn't exist.

When the tailor announced that he was finished, the emperor looked at his new robes in the mirror. As he stood there, naked as the day he was born, one could see how years of exploiting the peasantry had turned his body into an ugly mass of puffy white flesh. The emperor, of course, saw this too, but pretended that he could see the beautiful, politically correct robes. To show off his new splendor, he ordered a parade to be held the next day.

On the following morning, his subjects lined the streets for the big parade. Word had spread about the emperor's new clothes that only enlightened people with healthy lifestyles could see, and everyone was determined to be more right-minded than his or her neighbor.

The parade began with great hoopla. As the

emperor marched his pale, bloated, patriarchal carcass down the street, everyone loudly oohed and ahed at his beautiful new clothes. All except one small boy, who shouted:

"The emperor is naked!"

The parade stopped. The emperor paused. A hush fell over the crowd, until one quick-thinking peasant shouted:

"No, he isn't. The emperor is merely endorsing a clothing-optional lifestyle!"

A cheer went up from the crowd, and the throngs stripped off their clothes and danced in the sun, as Nature had intended. The country was clothing-optional from that day forward, and the tailor, deprived of any livelihood, packed up his needle and thread and was never heard from again.

THE THREE LITTLE PIGS

nce there were three little pigs who lived together in mutual respect and in harmony with their environment. Using materials that were indigenous to the area, they each built a beautiful house. One pig built a house of straw, one a house of sticks, and one a house of dung, clay, and creeper vines shaped into bricks and baked in a small kiln. When they were finished, the pigs were satisfied with their work and settled back to live in peace and self-determination.

But their idyll was soon shattered. One day, along came a big, bad wolf with expansionist ideas. He saw

the pigs and grew very hungry, in both a physical and an ideological sense. When the pigs saw the wolf, they ran into the house of straw. The wolf ran up to the house and banged on the door, shouting, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!"

The pigs shouted back, "Your gunboat tactics hold no fear for pigs defending their homes and culture."

But the wolf wasn't to be denied what he thought was his manifest destiny. So he huffed and puffed and blew down the house of straw. The frightened pigs ran to the house of sticks, with the wolf in hot pursuit. Where the house of straw had stood, other wolves bought up the land and started a banana plantation.

At the house of sticks, the wolf again banged on the door and shouted, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!"

The pigs shouted back, "Go to hell, you carnivorous, imperialistic oppressor!"

At this, the wolf chuckled condescendingly. He thought to himself: "They are so childlike in their ways. It will be a shame to see them go, but progress cannot be stopped."

So the wolf huffed and puffed and blew down the house of sticks. The pigs ran to the house of bricks, with the wolf close at their heels. Where the house

of sticks had stood, other wolves built a time-share condo resort complex for vacationing wolves, with each unit a fiberglass reconstruction of the house of sticks, as well as native curio shops, snorkeling, and dolphin shows.

At the house of bricks, the wolf again banged on the door and shouted, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in!"

This time in response, the pigs sang songs of solidarity and wrote letters of protest to the United Nations.

By now the wolf was getting angry at the pigs' refusal to see the situation from the carnivore's point of view. So he huffed and puffed, and huffed and puffed, then grabbed his chest and fell over dead from a massive heart attack brought on from eating too many fatty foods.

The three little pigs rejoiced that justice had triumphed and did a little dance around the corpse of the wolf. Their next step was to liberate their homeland. They gathered together a band of other pigs who had been forced off their lands. This new brigade of *porcinistas* attacked the resort complex with machine guns and rocket launchers and slaughtered the cruel wolf oppressors, sending a clear signal to the rest of the hemisphere not to meddle in their

internal affairs. Then the pigs set up a model socialist democracy with free education, universal health care, and affordable housing for everyone.

Please note: The wolf in this story was a metaphorical construct. No actual wolves were harmed in the writing of the story.

RUMPELSTILTSKIN

ong ago in a kingdom far away, there lived a miller who was very economically disadvantaged. This miller shared his humble dwelling with his only daughter, an independent young wommon named Esmeralda. Now, the miller was very ashamed of his poverty, rather than angry at the economic system that had marginalized him, and was always searching for a way to get rich quick.

"If only I could get my daughter to marry a rich man," he mused, in a sexist and archaic way, "she'll be fulfilled and I'll never have to work another day in my life." To this shabby end, he had an inspiration. He would start a rumor that his daughter was

able to spin common barnyard straw into pure gold. With this untruth, he would be able to attract the attention of many rich men and marry off Esmeralda.

The rumor spread through the kingdom in a manner that just happened to be like wildfire and soon reached the prince. As greedy and gullible as most men of his station, he believed the rumor and invited Esmeralda to his castle for a May Day festival. But when she arrived, he had her thrown into a dungeon filled with straw and ordered her to spin it into gold.

Locked in the dungeon, fearing for her life, Esmeralda sat on the floor and wept. Never had the exploitativeness of the patriarchy been made so apparent to her. As she cried, a diminutive man in a funny hat appeared in the dungeon.

"Why are you crying, my dear?" he asked.

Esmeralda was startled but answered him: "The prince has ordered me to spin all this straw into gold."

"But why are you crying?" he asked again.

"Because it can't be *done.* What are you, specially abled or something?"

The differently statured man laughed and said, "Dearie, you are thinking too much with the left

side of your brain, you are. But you are in luck. I will show you how to perform this task, yes, but first you must promise to give me what I want in return."

With no alternative, Esmeralda gave her assent. To turn the straw into gold, they took it to a nearby farmers' cooperative, where it was used to thatch an old roof. With a drier home, the farmers became healthier and more productive, and they brought forth a record harvest of wheat for local consumption. The children of the kingdom grew strong and tall, went to a cooperative school, and gradually turned the kingdom into a model democracy with no economic or sexual injustice and low infant mortality rates. For his part, the prince was captured by an angry mob and stabbed to death with pitchforks outside the palace. As new investment money poured in from all over the world, the farmers remembered Esmeralda's generous gift of straw and rewarded her with numerous chests of gold.

When all this was done, the diminutive man in the funny hat laughed and said, *"That* is how you turn straw into gold." Then his expression became menacing. "Now that I have done my work, you must fulfill your part of the bargain. You must give me your first-born child!"

Esmeralda shot back at him, "I don't have to negotiate with anyone who would interfere with my reproductive rights!"

The vertically challenged man was taken aback by the conviction in her voice. Deciding on a change in tactics, he said slyly, "Fair enough, dearie. I'll let you out of the bargain if you can guess what my name is."

"All right," said Esmeralda. She paused a second, tapped her chin with her finger, and said, "Would your name be . . . oh, I don't know, maybe . . . Rumpelstiltskin?"

"AAAAAKKKK!!" shrieked the man of nonstandard height. "But . . . but . . . how did you know?"

She replied, "You are still wearing your name badge from the Little People's Empowerment Seminar."

Rumpelstiltskin screamed in anger and stamped his foot, at which point the earth cracked open and swallowed him up in a rush of smoke and sulphur. With her gold, Esmeralda moved to California to open a birth-control clinic, where she showed other womyn how not to be enslaved by their reproductive systems and lived to the end of her days as a fulfilled, dedicated single person.

THE THREE CODEPENDENT GOATS GRUFF

nce on a lovely mountainside lived three goats who were related as siblings. Their name was Gruff, and they were a very close family. During the winter months they lived in a lush, green valley, eating grass and doing other things in a naturally goatish manner. When summer came, they would travel up the mountainside to where the pasture was sweeter. This way, they did not overgraze their valley and kept their ecological footprint as small as possible.

To get to this pasture, the goats had to cross a bridge over a wide chasm. When the first days of summer came, one goat set out to cross the bridge. This goat was the least chronologically accomplished of the siblings and thus had achieved the least superiority in size. When he reached the bridge, he lashed on his safety helmet and grasped the handrail. But as he began to cross, a menacing growl came from beneath the bridge.

Over the railing and onto the bridge leaped a troll—hairy, dirt-accomplished, and odor-enhanced. "Yaaarrrgh!!" intoned the troll. "I am the keeper of this bridge, and while goats may have the right to cross it, I'll eat any that try!"

"But why, Mr. Troll?" bleated the goat.

"Because I'm a troll, and proud of it. I have a troll's needs, and those needs include eating goats, so you better respect them or else."

The goat was frightened. "Certainly, sir," he stammered. "If eating me would help you become a more complete troll, nothing would please me more. But I really can't commit to that course of action without first consulting my siblings. Will you excuse me?" And the goat ran back to the valley.

Next, the middle sibling goat came up to the

bridge. This goat was more chronologically advanced than the first goat and so enjoyed an advantage in size (although this did not make him a better or more deserving goat). He was about to cross the bridge when the troll stopped him.

"Nature has made me a troll," he said, "and I embrace my trollhood. Would you deny me my right to live the life of a troll as fully and effectively as I can?"

"Me? Never!" exclaimed the goat proudly.

"Then stand still there while I come over and eat you up. And don't try to run away; I would take that as a personal affront." He began to invade the goat's caprinal space.

"However," blurted the goat, "I have a very close family, and it would be selfish of me to allow myself to be eaten without asking their opinion. I have respect for their feelings, too. I would hate to think that my absence would cause them any emotional stress, if I hadn't first. . . ."

"*Go* then!" screamed the troll.

"I'll rush back here as soon as we reach a consensus," the goat said, "for it's not fair to keep you in suspense."

"You're too kind," sighed the troll, and the goat ran back to the valley. As his hunger grew, the troll

began to feel a real grievance toward the goats. If he didn't get to eat at least one of them, he was determined to go to the authorities.

When the third goat came to the bridge, the troll discovered that he was nearly twice the troll's size, with large, sharp horns and hard, heavy hooves. The troll felt his physical-intimidation prerogative fading fast. As fear turned his insides into jelly, the troll sank to his knees and pleaded, "Oh, please, please forgive me! I was using you and your goat siblings for my own selfish ends. I don't know what drove me to it, but I've seen the error of my ways."

The goat, too, got down on what passed for knees in goats and said, "Now, now, you can't take all the blame for yourself. Our presence and supreme edibility put you in this situation. My siblings and I all feel terrible. Please, *you* must forgive *us."*

The troll began to sob. "No, no, it's all my fault. I threatened and bullied you all, just for the sake of my own survival. How selfish I was!"

But the goat would have none of this. "We were the selfish ones. We only wanted to save our own skins, and we totally neglected your needs. Please, eat me now!"

"No," the troll said, "you must butt me off this bridge for my insensitivity and selfishness."

"I'll do no such thing," said the goat, "since we all tempted you in the first place. Here, have a chomp. Go ahead."

"I'm telling you," the troll insisted, standing up, "I'm the guilty one here. Now, knock me off this bridge and be quick about it!"

"Look," said the goat, rearing to his full height, "no one is going to take away my blame for this, not even you, so eat me before I pop you in the nose."

"Don't play guiltier-than-thou with me, Hornhead!"

"'Hornhead'? You smelly hairball! I'll show you guilt!" And with that, they wrestled and bit and punched and kicked as each sought to don the mantle of blame.

The other two goats bounded up to the bridge and sized up the fight. Feeling guilty at not accepting enough of the blame, they joined the others in a whirling ball of hair, hooves, horns, and teeth. But the little bridge was not built to carry such weight. It shook and swayed and finally buckled, hurling the troll and the three codependent goats Gruff into the chasm. On their way down, they each felt relieved that they would finally get what they deserved, plus, as a bonus, a little extra guilt for the fate of the others.

RAPUNZEL

here once lived an economically disadvantaged tinker and his wife. His lack of material accomplishment is not meant to imply that all tinkers are economically marginalized, or that if they are, they deserve to be so. While the archetype of the tinker is generally the whipping person in classical bedtime stories, this particular individual was a tinker by trade and just happened to be economically disadvantaged.

The tinker and his wife lived in a little hovel next to the modest estate of a local witch. From their window, they could see the witch's meticulously kept garden, a nauseating attempt to impose human notions of order onto Nature.

The wife of the tinker was pregnant, and as she gazed at the witch's garden, she began to crave some of the lettuce she saw growing there. She begged the tinker to jump the fence and get some for her. The tinker finally submitted, and at night he jumped the wall and liberated some of the lettuce. But before he could get back, the witch caught him.

Now, this witch was very kindness-impaired. (This is not meant to imply that all, or even some, witches are that way, nor to deny this particular witch her right to express whatever disposition came naturally to her. Far from it, her disposition was without doubt due to many factors of her upbringing and socialization, which, unfortunately, must be omitted here in the interest of brevity.)

As mentioned earlier, the witch was kindness-impaired, and the tinker was extremely frightened. She held him by the scruff of the neck and asked, "Where are you going with my lettuce?"

The tinker might have argued with her over the concept of ownership and stated that the lettuce rightfully "belonged" to anyone who was hungry and had nerve enough to take it. Instead, in a degrading spectacle, he pleaded for mercy. "It was my wife's fault," he cried in a characteristically male

manner. “She is pregnant and has a craving for some of your lovely lettuce. Please spare me. Although a single-parent household is certainly acceptable, please don’t kill me and deprive my child of a stable, two-parent family structure.”

The witch thought for a moment, then let go of the tinker’s neck and disappeared without a word. The tinker gratefully went home with the lettuce. A few months later, and after agonizing pain that a man will never really be able to appreciate, the tinker’s wife gave birth to a beautiful, healthy prewommon. They named the baby Rapunzel, after a type of lettuce.

Not long after this, the witch appeared at their door, demanding that they give her the child in return for the witch’s having spared the tinker’s life in the garden. What could they do? Their powerless station in life had always left them open to exploitation, and this time they felt they had no alternative. They gave Rapunzel to the witch, who sped away.

The witch took the child deep into the woods and imprisoned her in a tall tower, the symbolism of which should be obvious. There Rapunzel grew to wommonhood. The tower had no door or stairs, but it did boast a single window at the top. The

only way for anyone to get to the window was for Rapunzel to let down her long, luxurious hair and climb it to the top, the symbolism of which should also be obvious.

The witch was Rapunzel's only companion. She would stand at the foot of the tower and shout,

> "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair,
> "That I might climb your golden stair."

Rapunzel obediently did as she was told. Thus for years she let her body be exploited for the transportational needs of another. The witch loved music and taught Rapunzel to sing. They passed many long hours singing together in the tower.

One day a young prince rode near the tower and heard Rapunzel singing. But as he rode closer to find the source of the lovely sound, he spied the witch and hid himself and his equine companion in the trees. He watched as the witch called out to Rapunzel, the hair fell down, and the witch climbed up. Again, he heard the beautiful singing. Later, when the witch finally exited the tower and disappeared in the other direction, the prince came out of the woods and called up:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair,
"That I might climb your golden stair."

The hair cascaded from the window, and he climbed up.

When the prince saw Rapunzel, her greater-than-average physical attractiveness and her long, luxurious hair led him to think, in a typically lookist way, that her personality would also be beautiful. (This is not to imply that all princes judge people solely on their appearance, nor to deny this particular prince his right to make such assumptions. Please see the disclaimers in the paragraphs above.)

The prince said, "Oh, beautiful damsel, I heard you singing as I rode by on my horse. Please sing for me again."

Rapunzel didn't know what to make of this person, since she had never seen a man up close before. He seemed a strange creature—large, hairy in the face, and possessing a strong, musky odor. For reasons she could not explain, Rapunzel found this combination somewhat attractive and opened her mouth to sing.

"Stop right there!" screamed a voice from the window. The witch had returned!

"How . . . how did you get up here?" Rapunzel asked.

"I had an extra set of hair made, in case of emergency," said the witch matter-of-factly. "And this certainly looks like one. Listen to me, Prince! I built this tower to keep Rapunzel away from men like you. I taught her to sing, training her voice for years. She'll stay here and sing for no one but me, because I am the only one who truly loves her."

"We can talk about your codependency problems later," said the prince. "But first let me hear . . . Rapunzel, is it? . . . let me hear Rapunzel sing."

"NO!" screamed the witch. "I'm going to throw you from the tower into the thorn-of-color bushes below so that your eyes will be gouged out and you'll wander the countryside cursing your bad luck for the rest of your life!"

"You may want to reconsider that," said the prince. "I have some friends in the recording industry, you see, who would be very interested in . . . Rapunzel, wasn't it? Different, kind of catchy, I suppose. . ."

"I knew it! You want to take her from me!"

"No, no, I want you to continue to train her, to nurture her . . . as her *manager*," said the prince.

"Then, when the time is right, say a week or two, you can unleash her talent on the world and we can all rake in the cash."

The witch paused for a second to think about this, and her demeanor visibly softened. She and the prince began to discuss record contracts and video deals, as well as possible marketing ideas, including life-like Rapunzel™ dolls with their very own miniature stereo Tune-Towers™.

As Rapunzel watched, her suspicions turned into revulsion. For years, her hair had been exploited for the transportational needs of others. Now they wanted to exploit her voice as well. "So, rapaciousness does not depend solely on gender," she realized with a sigh.

Rapunzel edged her way to the window without being seen. She stepped out and climbed down the second set of hair to the prince's waiting horse. She dislodged the hair and took it with her as she rode off, leaving the witch and the prince to argue about royalties and percentages in their phallus-shaped tower.

Rapunzel rode to the city and rented a room in a building that had real stairs. She later established the non-profit Foundation for the Free Proliferation of

Music and cut off her hair for a fund-raising auction. She sang for free in coffee houses and art galleries for the rest of her days, always refusing to exploit for money other people's desires to hear her sing.

CINDERELLA

here once lived a young wommon named Cinderella, whose natural birthmother had died when Cinderella was but a child. A few years after, her father married a widow with two older daughters. Cinderella's mother-of-step treated her very cruelly, and her sisters-of-step made her work very hard, as if she were their own personal unpaid laborer.

One day an invitation arrived at their house. The prince was celebrating his exploitation of the dispossessed and marginalized peasantry by throwing a fancy dress ball. Cinderella's sisters-of-step were very excited to be invited to the palace. They began to plan the expensive clothes they would use to alter

and enslave their natural body images to emulate an unrealistic standard of feminine beauty. (It was especially unrealistic in their case, as they were differently visaged enough to stop a clock.) Her mother-of-step also planned to go to the ball, so Cinderella was working harder than a dog (an appropriate if unfortunately speciesist metaphor).

When the day of the ball arrived, Cinderella helped her mother- and sisters-of-step into their ball gowns. A formidable task: It was like trying to force ten pounds of processed nonhuman animal carcasses into a five-pound skin. Next came immense cosmetic augmentation, which it would be best not to describe at all. As evening fell, her mother- and sisters-of-step left Cinderella at home to finish her housework. Cinderella was sad, but she contented herself with her Holly Near records.

Suddenly there was a flash of light, and in front of Cinderella stood a man dressed in loose-fitting, all-cotton clothes and wearing a wide-brimmed hat. At first Cinderella thought he was a Southern lawyer or a bandleader, but he soon put her straight.

"Hello, Cinderella, I am your fairy godperson, or individual deity proxy, if you prefer. So, you want to go to the ball, eh? And bind yourself into the male

concept of beauty? Squeeze into some tight-fitting dress that will cut off your circulation? Jam your feet into high-heeled shoes that will ruin your bone structure? Paint your face with chemicals and make-up that have been tested on nonhuman animals?"

"Oh yes, definitely," she said in an instant. Her fairy godperson heaved a great sigh and decided to put off her political education till another day. With his magic, he enveloped her in a beautiful, bright light and whisked her away to the palace.

Many, many carriages were lined up outside the palace that night; apparently, no one had ever thought of carpooling. Soon, in a heavy, gilded carriage painfully pulled by a team of horse-slaves, Cinderella arrived. She was dressed in a clinging gown woven of silk stolen from unsuspecting silkworms. Her hair was festooned with pearls plundered from hard-working, defenseless oysters. And on her feet, dangerous though it may seem, she wore slippers made of finely cut crystal.

Every head in the ballroom turned as Cinderella entered. The men stared at and lusted after this wommon who had captured perfectly their Barbie-doll ideas of feminine desirability. The womyn, trained at an early age to despise their own bodies,

looked at Cinderella with envy and spite. Cinderella's own mother- and sisters-of-step, consumed with jealousy, failed to recognize her.

Cinderella soon caught the roving eye of the prince, who was busy discussing jousting and bear-baiting with his cronies. Upon seeing her, the prince was struck with a fit of not being able to speak as well as the majority of the population. "Here," he thought, "is a wommon that I could make my princess and impregnate with the progeny of our perfect genes, and thus make myself the envy of every other prince for miles around. And she's blond, too!"

The prince began to cross the ballroom toward his intended prey. His cronies also began to walk toward Cinderella. So did every other male in the ballroom who was younger than 70 and not serving drinks.

Cinderella was proud of the commotion she was causing. She walked with head high and carried herself like a wommon of eminent social standing. But soon it became clear that the commotion was turning into something ugly, or at least socially dysfunctional.

The prince had made it clear to his friends that he was intent on "possessing" the young wommon. But the prince's resoluteness angered his pals, for they

too lusted after her and wanted to own her. The men began to shout and push each other. The prince's best friend, who was a large if cerebrally constrained duke, stopped him halfway across the dance floor and insisted that *he* was going to have Cinderella. The prince's response was a swift kick to the groin, which left the duke temporarily inactive. But the prince was quickly seized by other sex-crazed males, and he disappeared into a pile of human animals.

The womyn were appalled by this vicious display of testosterone, but try as they might, they were unable to separate the combatants. To the other womyn, it seemed that Cinderella was the cause of all the trouble, so they encircled her and began to display very unsisterly hostility. She tried to escape, but her impractical glass slippers made it nearly impossible. Fortunately for her, none of the other womyn were shod any better.

The noise grew so loud that no one heard the clock in the tower chime midnight. When the bell rang the twelfth time, Cinderella's beautiful gown and slippers disappeared, and she was dressed once again in her peasant's rags. Her mother- and sisters-of-step recognized her now, but kept quiet to avoid embarrassment.

The womyn grew silent at this magical transformation. Freed from the confinements of her gown and slippers, Cinderella sighed and stretched and scratched her ribs. She smiled, closed her eyes and said, "Kill me now if you want, sisters, but at least I'll die in comfort."

The womyn around her again grew envious, but this time they took a different approach: Instead of exacting vengeance on her, they stripped off their bodices, corsets, shoes, and every other confining garment. They danced and jumped and screeched in sheer joy, comfortable at last in their shifts and bare feet.

Had the men looked up from their macho dance of destruction, they would have seen many desirable womyn dressed as if for the boudoir. But they never ceased pounding, punching, kicking, and clawing each other until, to the last man, they were dead.

The womyn clucked their tongues but felt no remorse. The palace and realm were theirs now. Their first official act was to dress the men in their discarded dresses and tell the media that the fight arose when someone threatened to expose the cross-dressing tendencies of the prince and his cronies. Their second was to set up a clothing co-op that

produced only comfortable, practical clothes for womyn. Then they hung a sign on the castle advertising CinderWear (for that was what the new clothing was called), and through self-determination and clever marketing, they all—even the mother- and sisters-of-step—lived happily ever after.

GOLDILOCKS

hrough the thicket, across the river, and deep, deep in the woods, lived a family of bears—a Papa Bear, a Mama Bear, and a Baby Bear—and they all lived together anthropomorphically in a little cottage as a nuclear family. They were very sorry about this, of course, since the nuclear family has traditionally served to enslave womyn, instill a self-righteous moralism in its members, and imprint rigid notions of heterosexualist roles onto the next generation. Nevertheless, they tried to be happy and took steps to avoid these pitfalls, such as naming their offspring the non-gender-specific "Baby."

One day, in their little anthropomorphic cottage,

they sat down to breakfast. Papa Bear had prepared big bowls of all-natural porridge for them to eat. But straight off the stove, the porridge was too thermally enhanced to eat. So they left their bowls to cool and took a walk to visit their animal neighbors.

After the bears left, a melanin-impoverished young wommon emerged from the bushes and crept up to the cottage. Her name was Goldilocks, and she had been watching the bears for days. She was, you see, a biologist who specialized in the study of anthropomorphic bears. At one time she had been a professor, but her aggressive, masculine approach to science—ripping off the thin veil of Nature, exposing its secrets, penetrating its essence, using it for her own selfish needs, and bragging about such violations in the letters columns of various magazines—had led to her dismissal.

The rogue biologist had been watching the cottage for some time. Her intent was to collar the bears with radio transmitters and then follow them in their migratory and other life patterns, with an utter disregard for their personal (or rather, animal) privacy. With scientific espionage the only thing in mind, Goldilocks broke into the bears' cottage. In the kitchen, she laced the bowls of porridge with a tran-

quilizing potion. Then, in the bedroom, she rigged snares beneath the pillows of each bed. Her plan was to drug the bears and, when they stumbled into their bedroom to take a nap, lash radio collars to their necks as their heads hit the pillows.

Goldilocks chortled and thought: "These bears will be my ticket to the top! I'll show those twerps at the university the kind of guts it takes to do *real* research!" She crouched in a corner of the bedroom and waited. And waited, and waited some more. But the bears took so long to come back from their walk that she fell asleep.

When the bears finally came home, they sat down to eat breakfast. Then they stopped.

Papa Bear asked, "Does your porridge smell . . . off, Mama?"

Mama Bear replied, "Yes, it does. Does yours smell off, Baby?"

Baby Bear said, "Yes, it does. It smells kind of chemical-y."

Suspicious, they rose from the table and went into the living room. Papa Bear sniffed. He asked, "Do you smell something else, Mama?"

Mama Bear replied, "Yes, I do. Do you smell something else, Baby?"

Baby Bear said, “Yes, I do. It smells musky and sweaty and not at all clean.”

They moved into the bedroom with growing alarm. Papa Bear asked, “Do you see a snare and a radio collar under my pillow. Mama?”

Mama Bear replied, ‘Yes I do. Do you see a snare and a radio collar under my pillow, Baby?”

Baby Bear said, ‘Yes I do, and I see the human who put them there!”

Baby Bear pointed in the corner to where Goldilocks slept. The bears growled, and Goldilocks awoke with a start. She sprang up and tried to run, but Papa Bear caught her with a swing of his paw, and Mama Bear did the same. With Goldilocks now a mobility nonpossessor, Mama and Papa Bear set on her with fang and claw. They gobbled her up, and soon there was nothing left of the maverick biologist but a bit of yellow hair and a clipboard.

Baby Bear watched with astonishment. When they were done, Baby Bear asked, “Mama, Papa, what have you done? I thought we were vegetarians.”

Papa Bear burped. “We are,” he said, “but we’re always ready to try new things. Flexibility is just one more benefit of being multicultural.”

SNOW WHITE

nce there was a young princess who was not at all unpleasant to look at and had a temperament that many found to be more pleasant than most other people's. Her nickname was Snow White, indicative of the discriminatory notions of associating pleasant or attractive qualities with light, and unpleasant or unattractive qualities with darkness. Thus, at an early age, Snow White was an unwitting if fortunate target for this type of colorist thinking.

When Snow White was quite young, her mother was suddenly stricken ill, grew more advanced in nonhealth, and finally was rendered nonviable. Her father, the king, grieved for what can be considered a

healthy period of time, then asked another wommon to be his queen. Snow White did her best to please her new mother-of-step, but a cold distance remained between them.

The queen's prized possession was a magic mirror that would answer truthfully any question asked it. Now, years of social conditioning in a male hierarchical dictatorship had left the queen very insecure about her own self-worth. Physical beauty was the one standard she cared about now, and she defined herself solely in regard to her personal appearance. So every morning the queen would ask her mirror:

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
"Who's the fairest one of all?"

Her mirror would answer:

"For all it's worth, O my queen,
"Your beauty is the fairest to be seen."

That dialogue went on regularly until once when the queen was having a bad hair day and was desperately in need of support, she asked the usual question and the mirror answered:

"Alas, if worth be based on beauty,
"Snow White has surpassed you, cutie."

At this the queen flew into a rage. The chance to work with Snow White to form a strong bond of sisterhood had long passed. Instead, the queen indulged in an adopted masculine power trip and ordered the royal woodsperson to take Snow White into the forest and kill her. And, possibly to impress the males in the royal court, she barbarously ordered that the girl's heart be cut out and brought back to her.

The woodsperson sadly agreed to these orders, and led the girl, who was now actually a young wommon, into the middle of the forest. But his connections to the earth and seasons had made him a kind soul, and he couldn't bear to harm the girl. He told Snow White of the oppressive and unsisterly order of the queen and told her to run as deeply as she could into the forest.

The frightened Snow White did as she was told. The woodsperson, fearing the queen's wrath but unwilling to take another life merely to indulge her vanity, went into town and had the candy maker concoct a heart of red marzipan. When he presented

this to the queen, she hungrily devoured the heart in a sickening display of pseudo-cannibalism.

Meanwhile, Snow White ran deep into the woods. Just when she thought she had fled as far as she could from civilization and its unhealthy influences, she stumbled upon a cottage. Inside she saw seven tiny beds, set in a row and all unmade. She also saw seven sets of dishes piled high in the sink and seven Barcaloungers in front of seven remote-controlled TVs. She surmised that the cottage belonged to either seven little men or one sloppy numerologist. The beds looked so inviting that the tired youngster curled up on one and immediately fell asleep.

When she awoke several hours later, she saw the faces of seven bearded, vertically challenged men surrounding the bed. She sat up with a start and gasped. One of the men said, "You see that? Just like a flighty woman: resting peacefully one minute, up and screaming the next."

"I agree," said another. "She'll disrupt our strong bond of brotherhood and create competition among us for her affections. I say we throw her in the river in a sack full of rocks."

"I agree we should get rid of her," said a third, "but why degrade the ecology? Let's just feed her to

a bear or something and let her become part of the food chain."

"Hear, hear!"

"Sound thinking, brother."

When Snow White finally regained her senses, she begged, "Please, please don't kill me. I meant no harm by sleeping on your bed. I thought no one would ever notice."

"Ah, you see?" said one of the men. "Female pre-occupations are already surfacing. She's complaining that we don't make our beds."

"Kill her! Kill her!"

"Please, no!" she cried. "I have traveled so deep into these woods because my mother-of-step, the queen, ordered me killed."

"See that? Internecine female vindictiveness!"

"Don't try and play the victim with *us,* kid!"

"QUIET!" boomed one of the men, who had flaming red hair and a nonhuman animal skin on his head. Snow White quickly realized that he was their leader and that her fate rested in his hands. "Explain yourself. What's your name, and why have you really come here?"

"My name is Snow White," she began, "and I've already told you: My mother-of-step, the queen,

ordered a woodsperson to take me in the forest and kill me, but he took pity and told me to run away into the woods as far as I could."

"Just like a woman," grumbled one of the men under his breath, "get a man to do her dirty work."

The leader held up his hands for silence. He said, "Well, Snow White, if that's your story, I guess we'll have to believe you."

Snow White was beginning to resent her treatment but tried not to let it show. "And who are you guys, anyway?"

"We are known as the Seven Towering Giants," said the leader. Snow White's suppression of a giggle did not go unnoticed. The leader continued. "We are towering in *spirit* and so *Are giants* among the men of the forest. We used to earn our living by digging in our mines, but we decided that such a rape of the planet was immoral and short-sighted (besides, the bottom fell out of the metals market). So now we are dedicated stewards of the earth and live here in harmony with nature. To make ends meet, we also conduct retreats for men who need to get in touch with their primitive masculine identities."

"So what does that involve," asked Snow White, "aside from drinking milk straight from the carton?"

"Your sarcasm is ill-advised," warned the leader of the Seven Towering Giants. "My fellow giants want to get rid of your corrupting feminine presence, and I might not be able to stop them, understand? My men, we must speak our hearts openly and honestly. Let us adjourn to the sweat lodge!"

The seven little men scampered out the front door, whooping and stripping off their clothes. Snow White didn't know what to do while waiting. For fear of stepping on anything that might be scurrying about amid the debris on the floor, she stayed on the bed, although she did manage to make it without ever stepping off

Snow White heard drumming and shouts, and, soon after, the Seven Towering Giants came back into the cottage. They didn't smell as bad as she thought they would, and thankfully they all wore loincloths.

"Agggh! Look what she's done to my bed! I want her out of here! I want to change my vote!"

"Calm down, brother," said the leader. "Don't you see? This is just what we were talking about: contrasts. We can better measure our progress as true men if there is a female around for comparison."

The men grumbled among themselves about the

wisdom of this decision. But Snow White had had enough. "I resent being kept around like an object, just a yardstick for your egos and penises!"

"Fair enough," the leader said. "You're free to make your way back through the woods. Give our regards to the queen."

"Well, I guess I can stay until I figure out a new plan," she said.

"Very well," said the leader, "but we have a few ground rules. No dusting. No straightening up. And no rinsing out underwear in the sink."

"And no peeking in the sweat lodge."

"And stay away from our drums."

Meanwhile, back at the castle, the queen rejoiced at the thought that her rival in beauty had been eliminated. She puttered around her boudoir reading *Glamour* and *Elle,* and indulged herself with three whole pieces of chocolate without purging. Later, she confidently strolled up to her magic mirror and asked her same, sad question:

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
"Who's the fairest one of all?"

The mirror replied,

"Your weight is perfect for your shape and height,
"But for sheer OOOOMPH!, you can't beat Snow White."

At this news, the queen clenched her fists and screamed at the top of her lungs. For years, her insecurities had been eating away at her until now they turned her into someone who was morally out of the mainstream. With cunning and malice, she began to devise a plan to ensure the nonviability of her daughter-of-step.

A few days later, Snow White, to be sure she didn't touch or rearrange anything, was meditating on the floor in the middle of the cottage. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. Snow White opened the door to find a chronologically gifted woman with a basket in her hand. By the look of her clothes, she was apparently unfettered by the confines of regular employment.

"Help a woman of unreliable income, dearie," she said, "and buy one of my apples."

Snow White thought for a moment. In protest against agribusiness conglomerates, she had a personal rule against buying food from middlepersons. But her heart went out to the economically marginalized

woman, so she said yes. What Snow White didn't know was that this was really the queen in disguise and that the apple had been chemically and genetically altered so that whoever bit it would sleep forever.

When Snow White handed over the money for the apple, you would have expected the queen to be gleeful that her plan for revenge was working. Instead, as she looked at Snow White's fine complexion and slim, taut body, she felt alternating waves of envy and self-revulsion. Finally, she burst into tears.

"Why, whatever is the matter?" asked Snow White.

"You're so young and beautiful," sobbed the disguised queen, "and I'm horrible to look at and getting worse."

'You shouldn't say that. After all, beauty comes from inside a person."

"I've been telling myself that for years," said the queen, "and I still don't believe it. How do you stay in such perfect shape?"

'Well, I meditate, work out in step aerobics three hours a day, and eat only half-portions of anything placed in front of me. Would you like me to show you?"

"Oh, yes, yes, please," said the queen. So they started out with 30 minutes of simple hatha yoga meditation, then worked out on the step for another hour. As they relaxed afterward, Snow White cut her apple in half and gave a piece to the queen. Without thinking, the queen bit into it, and both of them fell into a deep sleep.

Later that day, the Seven Towering Giants returned from a retreat in the woods, elaborately decked out in animal skins, feathers, and mud. With them was a prince from a nearby kingdom, who had come on this male retreat to find a cure for his impotence (or, as he preferred to call it, his involuntary suspension from phallocentric activity). They were all laughing and high-fiving until they saw the bodies and stopped short.

"What has happened?" asked the prince.

"Apparently our house guest and this other woman got into some sort of catfight and killed each other," surmised one giant.

"If they thought that by doing this, they could make us slaves to our weaker emotions, they're wrong," fumed another.

"Well, as long as we have to dispose of them, let's practice one of those Viking funerals we've read about."

"You know," said the prince, "this might sound a little sick, but I trust you guys. I find that younger one attractive. Extremely attractive. Would you fellows mind . . . um . . . waiting outside while I . . . ?"

"Stop right there!" said the leader of the giants. "Those half-eaten apple pieces, that filthy costume—this has all the earmarks of some sort of magic spell. They're not really dead at all."

"Whew," sighed the prince, "that makes me feel better. So, could you guys take five and let me

"Hold it, Prince," said the leader. "Does Snow White make you feel like a *man* again?"

"She certainly does. Now, could you guys . . . ?"

"Don't touch her! You'll break the spell." The leader thought for a minute and said, "My brothers, I see certain economic possibilities arising from this. If we kept Snow White around here in this state, we could advertise our retreats as impotency therapy."

The giants nodded in agreement with this idea, but the prince interrupted, "But what about me? I've already paid for my retreat. Why don't I get to, um, take the cure?"

"No dice, Prince," said the leader. 'You can look but don't touch. Otherwise you'll break the spell. Tell you what, though. You can have the other one if you want."

"I don't want to sound classist," said the prince, "but she's not high enough *caliber* for me."

"That's pretty big talk from a man shooting blanks," said one of the giants, and everybody but the prince laughed.

The leader said, "Come on, brothers, let's lift these two off the floor and decide how we can best display them." It took three giants for each female, but they managed to get both bodies aloft. As soon as they did, however, the pieces of poisoned apple fell from the mouths of Snow White and the queen, and they awoke from the spell.

'What do you think you're doing? Put us down!" they shouted. The giants were so startled they almost dropped the womyn to the floor.

"That was the most sickening thing I have ever heard!" shouted the queen. "Offering us around like pieces of property!"

"And *you,"* said Snow White to the prince, "trying to make it with a girl in a coma! Yuck!"

"Hey, don't blame me," said the prince. "It's a medical condition."

The leader of the giants said, "Don't start tossing blame around. You both broke into our property in the first place. I can call the police!"

"Don't try it, Napoleon," said the queen. "This forest is property of the crown. *You* are the ones who are trespassing!"

This rejoinder caused quite a stir, but not as big a commotion as when the queen warned: "And another thing. While we were immobile and you all blathered on in your sexist way, I had a personal awakening. From now on, I am going to dedicate my life to healing the rift between womyn's souls and their bodies. I am going to teach womyn to accept their natural body images and become whole again. Snow White and I are going to build a womyn's spa and conference center on this very spot, where we can hold retreats, caucuses, and ovariums for the sisters of the world."

There was much shouting and name-calling, but the queen eventually had her way. Before the Seven Towering Giants could be evicted from their home, though, they packed up their sweat lodge and moved deeper into the woods. The prince stayed on at the spa as a cute but harmless tennis pro. And Snow White and the queen became good friends and earned worldwide fame for their contributions to sisterhood. The giants were never heard from again, save for little muddy footprints that were sometimes found in the morning outside the windows of the spa's locker room.

CHICKEN LITTLE

hicken Little lived on a winding country lane surrounded by tall oak trees. (It should be mentioned here that the name "Little" was a family name, and not a derogatory, size-biased nickname. It was only by sheer coincidence that Chicken Little was also of shorter-than-average height.) One day, Chicken Little was playing in the road when a gust of wind blew through the trees. An acorn was blown loose and hit Chicken Little squarely on the head.

Now, while Chicken Little had a small brain in the physical sense, she did use it to the best of her abilities. So when she screamed, "The sky is falling, the sky is falling!" her conclusion was not wrong or stupid or silly, only logically underenhanced.

Chicken Little ran down the road until she came to the house of her neighbor, Henny Penny, who was tending her garden. This was a simple task, since she didn't use any insecticide, herbicide, or fertilizer, and also permitted the native nonedible varieties of wildflower (sometimes branded "weeds") to mingle with her food crops. So, lost amid the foliage, Henny Penny heard Chicken Little's voice long before she saw her.

"The sky is falling! The sky is falling!"

Henny Penny stuck her head out from her garden and said, "Chicken Little! Why are you carrying on so?"

Chicken Little said, "I was playing in the road when a huge chunk of the sky fell and landed on my head. See? Here's the bump to prove it."

"There's just one thing to do," said Henny Penny.

'What's that?" asked Chicken Little.

"Sue the bastards!" said Henny Penny.

Chicken Little was puzzled. "Sue for what?"

"Personal injury, discrimination, intentional infliction of emotional distress, negligent infliction of emotional distress, tortious interference, the tort of outrage—you name it, we'll sue for it."

"Good gracious!" said Chicken Little. "What will we get for all of that?"

"We can get payment for pain and suffering, com-

pensatory damages, punitive damages, disability and disfigurement, long-term care, mental anguish, impaired earning power, loss of esteem . . .”

“Person, oh, person!” said Chicken Little joyfully. “Who are we going to sue?”

Well, I don’t think the sky *per se* is recognized as a suable entity by the state,” said Henny Penny.

“I guess we should go find a lawyer and learn who *is* suable,” said Chicken Little, her diminutive brain working overtime.

“That’s a good idea. And while we’re there, I can ask whom to sue for these ridiculously bony legs of mine. They’ve caused me nothing but anguish and embarrassment my whole life, and I should be compensated somehow for all that.”

So they ran farther down the road until they came to the house of their neighbor, Goosey Loosey. Goosey Loosey was busy teaching her canine animal companion to eat grass so she could avoid the guilty feelings that came with feeding the dog processed animal carcasses from a can.

“The sky is falling! The sky is falling!”

“Sue the bastards! Sue the bastards!”

Goosey Loosey leaned over her fence and said, “Land sakes! Why are you two carrying on so?”

"I was playing in the road and a piece of sky fell on my head," explained Chicken Little.

"So we're going to find a lawyer to tell us whom we can sue both for her injuries and for my bony legs."

"Oh good! Can I come and sue someone for my long, gangly neck? You know, nothing really flatters it, so I am convinced there's a conspiracy within the fashion industry against long-necked waterfowl."

So the three of them ran down the road looking for legal assistance.

"The sky is falling! The sky is falling!"

"Sue the bastards! Sue the bastards!"

"Smash the conspiracy! Smash the conspiracy!"

Farther down the road they met Foxy Loxy, who was dressed in a blue suit and carried a briefcase. He held up a paw to halt the entourage.

"And what are you three doing out on this lovely day?" asked Foxy Loxy.

"We're looking for someone to sue!" they shouted in unison.

"What are your grievances? Personal injury? Discrimination? Intentional infliction of emotional distress? Negligent infliction of emotional distress? Tortious interference? The tort of outrage?"

"Oh, yes, yes," the three said excitedly, "all that and more!"

"Well, then, you're in luck," said Foxy Loxy "My caseload has just eased up, so I will be able to represent you in any and all lawsuits we can manage to bring."

The trio cheered and flapped their wings. Chicken Little asked, "But who are we going to sue?"

Without missing a beat, Foxy Loxy said, "Who *aren't* we going to sue? Three hapless victims such as yourselves will be able to Find more guilty parties than you can shake a writ at. Now, let's all step into my office so we can discuss this further."

Foxy Loxy walked over to a small black metal door that was in the side of a small hill nearby. "Step right this way," he said as he lifted the latch. But the black door wouldn't open. Foxy Loxy tugged on it with one paw, then with both. It still wouldn't budge. He yanked and pulled violently, cursing the door, its mental abilities, and its sexual history.

Finally the door swung open, and a huge ball of fire shot out. This was really the door to Foxy Loxy's oven! But unfortunately for him, the ball of fire engulfed his head, burned off every hair and

whisker, and left him totally catatonic. Chicken Little, Henny Penny, and Goosey Loosey ran away, thankful that they had not been devoured.

However, the family of Foxy Loxy caught up with them. In addition to suing the manufacturer of the oven door on behalf of Foxy Loxy, the family brought suit against the three above-named barnyard fowl, claiming entrapment, reckless endangerment, and fraud. The family sought payment for pain and suffering, compensatory damages, punitive damages, disability and disfigurement, long-term care, mental anguish, impaired earning power, loss of esteem, and the loss of a good dinner. The three birds later brought a countersuit, and they've all been battling in court from that day to this.

THE FROG PRINCE

nce there was a young princess who, when she grew tired of beating her head against the male power structure at her castle, would relax by walking into the woods and sitting beside a small pond. There she would amuse herself by tossing her favorite golden ball up and down and pondering the role of the eco-feminist warrior in her era.

One day, while she was envisioning the utopia that her queendom could become if womyn were in the positions of power, she dropped the ball, which rolled into the pond. The pond was so deep and murky she couldn't see where it had gone. She didn't cry, of course, but she made a mental note to be more careful next time.

Suddenly she heard a voice say, "I can get your ball for you, princess."

She looked around, and saw the head of a frog popping above the surface of the pond. "No, no," she said, "I would never enslave a member of another species to work for my selfish desires."

The frog said, "Well, what if we make a deal on a contingency basis? I'll get your ball for you if you do me a favor in return."

The princess gladly agreed to this most equitable arrangement. The frog dived under the water and soon emerged with the golden ball in his mouth. He spit the ball on the shore and said, "Now that I've done you a favor, I'd like to explore your views on physical attraction between the species."

The princess couldn't imagine what the frog was talking about. The frog continued, "You see, I am not really a frog at all. I'm really a man, but an evil sorcerer has cast a spell on me. While my frog form is no better or worse—only different—than my human form, I would so much like to be among people again. And the only thing that can break this spell is a kiss from a princess."

The princess thought for a moment about whether sexual harassment could take place between

species, but her heart went out to the frog for his predicament. She bent down and kissed the frog on the forehead. Instantly the frog grew and changed. And there, standing in the water where the frog had been, was a man in a golf shirt and loud plaid pants—middle-aged, vertically challenged, and losing a little bit of hair on top.

The princess was taken aback. "I'm sorry if this sounds a little classist," she stammered, "but . . . what I mean to say is . . . don't sorcerers usually cast their spells on *princes*?"

"Ordinarily, yes," he said, "but this time the target was just an innocent businessman. You see, I'm a real estate developer, and the sorcerer thought I was cheating him in a property-line dispute. So he invited me out for a round of golf, and just as I was about to tee off, he transformed me. But my time as a frog wasn't wasted, you know. I've gotten to know every square inch of these woods, and I think it would be ideal for an office park/condo/resort complex. The location's great and the numbers crunch perfectly! The bank wouldn't lend any money to a frog, but now that I'm in human form again, they'll be eating out of my hand. Oh, will that be sweet! And let me tell you, this is going to be a big project! Just drain

the pond, cut down about 80 percent of the trees, get easements for. . . ."

The frog developer was cut short when the princess shoved her golden ball back into his mouth. She then pushed him back underwater and held him there until he stopped thrashing. As she walked back to the castle, she marveled at the number of good deeds that a person could do in just one morning. And while someone might have noticed that the frog was gone, no one ever missed the real estate developer.

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

nce upon a time, on a little farm, there lived a boy named Jack. He lived on the farm with his mother, and they were very excluded from the normal circles of economic activity. This cruel reality kept them in straits of direness, until one day Jack's mother told him to take the family cow into town and sell it for as much as he could.

Never mind the thousands of gallons of milk they had stolen from her! Never mind the hours of pleasure their bovine animal companion had provided! And forget about the manure they had appropriated

for their garden! She was now just another piece of property to them. Jack, who didn't realize that non-human animals have as many rights as human animals—perhaps even more—did as his mother asked.

On his way to town, Jack met an old magic vegetarian, who warned Jack of the dangers of eating beef and dairy products.

"Oh, I'm not going to eat this cow," said Jack. "I'm going to take her into town and sell her."

"But by doing that, you'll just perpetuate the cultural mythos of beef, ignoring the negative impact of the cattle industry on our ecology and the health and social problems that arise from meat consumption. But you look too simple to be able to make these connections, my boy. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll offer a trade of your cow for these three magic beans, which have as much protein as that entire cow but none of the fat or sodium."

Jack made the trade gladly and took the beans home to his mother. When he told her about the deal he had made, she grew very upset. She used to think her son was merely a conceptual rather than a linear thinker, but now she was sure that he was downright differently abled. She grabbed the three magic beans and threw them out the window in dis-

gust. Later that day, she attended her first support-group meeting with Mothers of Storybook Children.

The next morning, Jack stuck his head out the window to see if the sun had risen in the east again (he was beginning to see a pattern in this). But outside the window, the beans had grown into a huge stalk that reached through the clouds. Because he no longer had a cow to milk in the morning, Jack climbed the beanstalk into the sky.

At the top, above the clouds, he found a huge castle. It was not only big, but it was built to larger-than-average scale, as if it were the home of someone who just happened to be a giant. Jack entered the castle and heard beautiful music wafting through the air. He followed this sound until he found its source: a golden harp that played music without being touched. Next to this self-actualized harp was a hen sitting on a pile of golden eggs.

Now, the prospect of easy wealth and mindless entertainment appealed to Jack's bourgeois sensibilities, so he picked up both the harp and the hen and started to run for the front door. Then he heard thundering footsteps and a booming voice that said:

"FEE, FIE, FOE, FUM,
"I smell the blood of an English person!
"I'd like to learn about his culture and views on life!
"And share my own perspectives in an open and generous way!"

Unfortunately, Jack was too crazed with greed to accept the giant's offer of a cultural interchange. "It's only a trick," thought Jack. "Besides, what's a giant doing with such fine, delicate things? He must have stolen them from somewhere else, so I have every right to take them." His frantic justifications—remarkable for someone with his overtaxed mental resources—revealed a terrible callousness to the giant's personal rights. Jack apparently was a complete sizeist, who thought that all giants were clumsy, knowledge-impaired, and exploitable.

When the giant saw Jack with the magic harp and the hen, he asked, 'Why are you taking what belongs to me?"

Jack knew he couldn't outrun the giant, so he had to think fast. He blurted out, "I'm not taking them, my friend. I am merely placing them in my stewardship so that they can be properly managed and brought to their fullest potential. Pardon my bluntness, but you

giants are too simple in the head and don't know how to manage your resources properly. I'm just looking out for your interests. You'll thank me for this later."

Jack held his breath to see if the bluff would save his skin. The giant sighed heavily and said, 'Yes, you are right. We giants do use our resources foolishly. Why, we can't even discover a new beanstalk before we get so excited and pick away at it so much that we pull the poor thing right out of the ground!"

Jack's heart sank. He turned and looked out the front door of the castle. Sure enough, the giant had destroyed his beanstalk. Jack grew frightened and cried, "Now I'm trapped here in the clouds with you forever!"

The giant said, "Don't worry, my little friend. We are strict vegetarians up here, and there are always plenty of beans to eat. And besides, you won't be alone. Thirteen other men of your size have already climbed up beanstalks to visit us and stayed."

So Jack resigned himself to his fate as a member of the giant's cloud commune. He didn't miss his mother or their farm much, because up in the sky there was less work to do and more than enough to eat. And he gradually learned not to judge people based on their size ever again, except for those shorter than he.

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

he picturesque little town of Hamelin had everything a community could wish for—non-polluting industries, effective mass transit, and a well-balanced ethno-religious diversity. In fact, the town leaders had managed to legislate or intimidate away every element that could keep the citizens from living a good and sensitive life. Every element, that is, except the trailer park.

The trailer park on the edge of Hamelin was a civic embarrassment. Not only was it a terrible eyesore, with its rusted pickup trucks and trash heaps in

every backyard. Within it dwelled some of the most unregenerate and irredeemable people you could ever imagine—murderers of nondomestic animals, former clients of the correctional system, and off-road bikers. With their plastic daisy pinwheels, loud music, and drunken weekend brawls, they sent a shudder through every respectable person in town.

One day, after a particularly riotous road rally through the trailer park, the town leaders had a meeting. After heated debate, they decided that somehow they had to eradicate the trailer park. But they were at a loss as to how to do it without ignoring or infringing upon the rights of the people who lived there. Finally, after even more oratory, they decided to let that be someone else's worry, since they were already so burdened with more important concerns, such as declining property values. So the town leaders decided to advertise for someone to solve their problems.

Soon after the advertisement was sent out, a man appeared in town. He was very vertically gifted and of lower-than-average weight for his size. His clothes were worn in combinations never before seen or imagined, and his mannerisms and high-pitched voice were certainly unique. Although he

looked like he came from some world other than (but certainly not unequal to) our own, he gained the trust of the desperate town leaders.

"I will be able to rid your town of the trailer-park dwellers," said the man of enhanced strangeness, "but you must promise to pay me 100 pieces of gold."

The town leaders wanted this whole unpleasant business finished as soon as possible, so they readily assented. The sooner the trailer park was eliminated, the sooner they could all revert to their open-minded, progressive selves.

So the man of enhanced strangeness got down to work. He reached into his tattered knapsack and pulled out a sophisticated, compact recording machine. The people around him looked on with interest as he inserted a few tapes, set some knobs, and checked the sound levels. Then he began mumbling into the built-in microphone. No one could hear exactly what he was saying, but the man seemed to be lacking in coherence. Abruptly, he stopped mumbling, stood up, and told the town leaders that he needed a truck with a public-address system.

The authorities scrambled after this strange request. They managed to find such a truck at the

Department of Public Biodiversity and handed over the keys to the man of enhanced strangeness. He climbed in and drove off, popping the cassette he had made into the sound system. Everyone followed the truck as it headed toward the trailer park.

Soon music began to emerge from the slowly moving truck—generally country music but also occasional classics like "The Ballad of the Green Berets" and "Ghost Riders in the Sky." The town leaders were puzzled by this, until they noticed people emerging from their trailers, tool sheds, and taverns. The people had a certain glassy expression and talked to themselves as they stumbled along.

"I'm gonna go git me a job," said one. "I hear the carny is hirin'."

"I think I'll join the professional tractor-pull circuit," said another.

"Do you think I could make a livin' by signin' up for medical experiments?" asked a third.

The denizens of the trailer park followed the truck as it drove slowly toward the edge of town. Soon both they and it disappeared over the horizon, and the town leaders lifted a cheer.

About an hour later the truck returned, minus its entourage. "I led them all to the highway," said the

man of enhanced strangeness as he alighted from the truck. "They're out thumbing rides for anyplace but Hamelin. Now the trailer park is free for you to use in whatever way you want."

"Marvelous!" said one of the authorities, who was serving as a spokesperson. "Now that they're gone, we can commence with our plans for a Third-World Refugee Reorientation Center. Thank you, thank you."

"Now, if you will kindly pay me the 100 pieces of gold you promised, I'll be on my way."

"Well, er . . . Hamelin is striving to establish an economy that is based on human capital and not the mere exploitation of physical resources. And so, to this end, we'd like to offer you this coupon book, which entitles you to such services in Hamelin as free massages and seminars on releasing your inner child."

The man of enhanced strangeness squinted his eyes. "You promised me 100 pieces of gold," he said, growing visibly angry. "Now pay up or suffer the consequences."

"If you wish to abandon your responsibility for making the world a more equitable place," clucked the spokesperson, "so be it. We will have to give you

the official Hamelin IOU, which can be redeemed for a significant portion of its face value at many of the currency exchanges and liquor stores in the surrounding towns."

The man of enhanced strangeness paused, then chuckled eerily and climbed back in the truck. Before anyone could stop him, he began to drive through all the neighborhoods of Hamelin. As he went, the truck played a weird, high-pitched music that no one could recognize. Soon, the children of Hamelin emerged from their houses and streamed from their playgrounds. With glazed looks, they milled about in the streets. The town leaders could hear the children talking earnestly to each other:

"Free markets are the only sure way to give people the personal incentive to build a better society," said one child.

"We must respect the rights of citizens to preserve the ethnic purity of their neighborhoods," said another.

"Our only obligation as a society is to make sure everyone has a level playing field," said a third.

As their children began to form tax protest groups and gun clubs, the town leaders sadly realized that all their years of careful social planning

would soon come to nothing. The next day, they found the public-address truck on the outskirts of town, but there was no sign of the mysterious man whom they had tried to swindle.

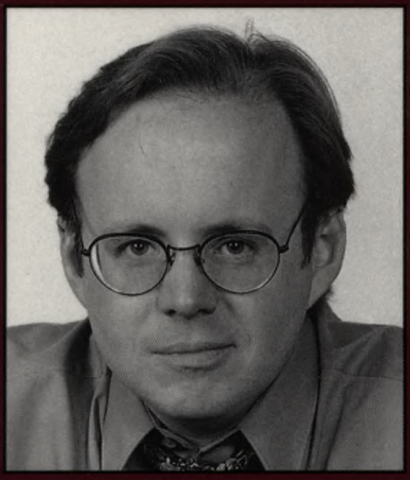


Photo by Dennis Sheehan

James Finn Garner, the descendant of dead white European males, is a writer and performer in Chicago. His work has been published in the **Chicago Tribune Magazine** and has appeared on Chicago Public Radio. This is his first processed tree carcass. He lives in Chicago, Illinois.

Jacket design by Wendy Bass
Jacket illustration by Carter Goodrich

MACMILLAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
866 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022

Copyright © 1994 Macmillan Publishing Company,
a division of Macmillan, Inc. (New York)

HUMOR

HERE'S WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT
POLITICALLY CORRECT BEDTIME STORIES:

"IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT JAMES FINN GARNER COULD IMPROVE UPON PERFECTION—BUT HE HAS!"
—HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

"WE WERE FIGHTING BETWEEN OURSELVES TO SEE WHO WOULD READ IT FIRST."
—THE BROTHERS GRIMM

"THESE STORIES ARE FABLES FOR OUR TIMES."
—AESOP

90000>
9 780025 427303
ISBN 0-02-542730-X